

ARNOLD, MD – Congressman Steny Hoyer gave the Commencement Address last night at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) where he congratulated the graduates and their families and spoke of the importance of lifelong learning in an age of rapid technological advancement, economic change and globalization. This morning, Rep. Hoyer also attended the U.S. Naval Academy Graduation ceremony in Annapolis. Congressman Hoyer has been a member of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors for the past 11 years. Following are Congressman Hoyer's AACC commencement remarks as prepared for delivery.

"It is a tremendous honor to participate in this 43rd commencement of the Anne Arundel Community College.

"To the graduates, let me offer my heartfelt congratulations on a job well done. I am told that there are more than 1,300 of you who are here tonight, recipients of Associates' Degrees and certificates, and that there are 1,439 graduates in the class of 2005. Most impressively, I understand that there are 363 of you who are graduating with honors. And you are to be commended.

"Your graduation from this college is not only a notable educational achievement, but also a milestone in your life – and the dawn of a bright future that awaits you and beckons you to seize it.

"As you mark the end of your studies at Anne Arundel Community College, celebrate this achievement and be proud. But in the days ahead, take a moment, take a step back, and recognize that this is not the end of your education. No, this is only the end of the beginning.

"In this new century – a century filled with hope and promise – commit yourself to lifelong learning. If you do, I assure you: you will not regret it. You will be rewarded, economically, professionally and otherwise.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as I look out at these fine new graduates tonight, I am filled with nothing but optimism and confidence in their future, as well as the future of our state and our nation. However, the brave new world that awaits them is not the one that so many of us entered just a few years ago.

“When I was coming of age, a single occupation could last a lifetime; a single skill could ensure that a worker could support his or her family and live comfortably until retirement. That obviously is not the world in which we find ourselves now. Today, just up over the horizon, this nation and our people face an enormous challenge.

“The journalist Thomas Friedman has described it this way, ‘if this moment has any parallel in recent American history, it is the height of the Cold War, around 1957, when the Soviet Union leapt ahead of America in the space race by putting up the Sputnik satellite.’

“He continued, ‘the main challenge then came from those who wanted to put up walls. The main challenge to America today comes from the fact that all the walls are being taken down and many other people can now compete and collaborate with us much more directly.’

“In the information age, knowledge is key and a commitment to lifelong learning is not a luxury, it is an imperative. Throughout the global economy, skills, intelligence and creativity are replacing mass and money. Where the economy of the last century was fueled by brawn, the economy in this new century is fueled by brains.

“This very issue, the centrality of knowledge in today’s economy, unites people across the political and ideological spectrum – Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, Bill Gates and business organizations such as the Business Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce.

‘We are living in a world,’ said President Clinton, ‘where what you can earn is a function of what you can learn.’

“Even the U.S. Commission on National Security in the 21st Century weighed in on this topic, stating: ‘in the next quarter century, we will likely see ourselves surpassed, and in relative decline, unless we make a conscious national commitment to maintain an edge.’ Ladies and gentlemen, our nation has never shrunk from challenge before. And we will not do so now.

“You, the graduates, have clearly grasped the implications of this challenge on your future, and you have made a commitment to furthering your education and acquiring new, productive skills.

“Tonight, I simply urge you: commit yourself to lifelong learning. Never stop developing your mind. Never stop acquiring new, productive skills. As the music great B.B. King once said: ‘the beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you.’”

“Again, I congratulate you, the graduates of Anne Arundel Community College, on this important accomplishment. We are proud of you. And we look forward to all of your successes in the future. Good luck and may God continue to bless you as you close this chapter in your life and prepare to open another.”

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